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R 121850Z MAY 77

FM AMEMBASSY BRASILIA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 1684

INFO AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO

AMCONSUL SAO PAULO

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E.O. 11652: XCDS-2

TAGS: PINT, BR

SUBJ: GOVERNMENT RESPONDS TO RISING LEVEL OF DEMONSTRATIONS BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

REF: SAO PAULO 1161

1. SUMMARY: UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN SOUTHERN BRAZIL HAVE RETURNED TO THE STREETS THIS SEMESTER WITH A SERIES OF POLITICAL DEMONSTRATIONS, THE LIKE OF WHICH HAS NOT BEEN SEEN FOR SEVERAL YEARS. INITIAL GOVERNMENT RESPONSE WAS TO IGNORE OR MINIMIZE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE EVENTS, BUT THE STEADILY RISING LEVEL OF POLITICAL ACTIVISM BY UNIVERSITY STUDENTS PROVOKED SERIOUS AND PROBABLY EXAGGERATED CONCERN OVER SUBVERSION ON THE PART OF GOVERNMENT FIGURES. THE JUSTICE MINISTER ASKED STATE GOVERNORS TO SEE THAT THE DEMONSTRATIONS ARE ENDED, AND THIS IN EFFECT HAS RESULTED SO FAR IN COLDING STUDENT PROTESTS TO THE CAMPUSES. END SUMMARY.

2. THOUSANDS OF BRAZILIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TOOK PART IN CAMPUS DEMONSTRATIONS MAY 10 IN THE STATES OF SAO PAULO, RIO DE JANEIRO, MINAS GERAIS AND RIO GRANDE DO SUL. ACCORDING TO NEWSPAPER REPORTS (THE GOVERNMENT HAS FORBIDDEN COVERAGE OF DEMONSTRATIONS ON RADIO AND TELEVISION) THE DEMONSTRATORS CALLED FOR INCREASED POLITICAL LIBERTIES IN BRAZIL AND THE RELEASE OF POLITICAL PRISONERS, PARTICULARLY EIGHT WORKERS AND STUDENTS RECENTLY ARRESTED IN SAO PAULO ON CHARGES OF SUBVERSION.

3. THE DEMONSTRATIONS CAME THE DAY AFTER JUSTICE MINISTER ARMANDO FALCAO, ACTING ON INSTRUCTIONS OF PRESIDENT GEISEL, ASKED STATE GOVERNORS TO PROHIBIT MARCHES, PROTEST MEETINGS AND SIMILAR GATHERINGS "WHICH ARE DISTURBANCES WITH SUBVERSIVE BASIS AND OBJECTIVES." PRESS REPORTS INDICATE THAT THE DEMONSTRATIONS WERE CLOSELY MONITORED BY LARGE CONTINGENTS OF STATE POLICE FORCES, WHICH WERE ABLE TO RESTRICT THE STUDENT PROTESTERS TO THEIR CAMPUSES, APPARENTLY WITHOUT SERIOUS CONFRONTATIONS. THESE WERE THE LARGEST DEMONSTRATIONS THUS FAR IN WHAT PROMISES TO BE A TROUBLED UNIVERSITY SEMESTER.

4. ACCORDING TO MAY 12 NEWSPAPER REPORTS, UNIVERSITY STUDENTS IN RIO DE JANEIRO ARE PLANNING TO HOLD DEMONSTRATIONS IN THE DOWNTOWN AREA ON MAY 19, WHICH MAY BE THE NEXT TEST BETWEEN THE GOVERNMENT AND THE STUDENTS. PRESS REPORTS ALSO INDICATE THAT STUDENTS AT THE ECONOMICS SCHOOL OF THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF BAHIA ARE GOING ON STRIKE MAY 12 IN SOLIDARITY WITH THE MOVEMENT IN OTHER STATES.

5. THE OPENING OF THE SCHOOL YEAR IN MARCH SAW A DEMONSTRATION AT THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF RIO GRANDE

DO SUL PROTESTING POOR TRANSPORTATION TO THE CAMPUS FAR FROM DOWNTOWN PORTO ALEGRE. STUDENTS AT THE FEDERAL UNIVERSITY IN CAMPINAS MADE THE SAME COMPLAINT AND AT THE PONTIFICAL CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY (PUC) IN RIO DE JANEIRO THERE WERE DEMONSTRATIONS AND STRIKES AGAINST TUITION INCREASES. THE MOVEMENT SPREAD TO BELO HORIZONTE, BRASILIA AND SAO PAULO, ALWAYS ON EDUCATIONAL OR SCHOOL-RELATED ISSUES SUCH AS POOR FOOD IN THE CAFETERIAS OR DEMANDS FOR INCREASED FEDERAL SUPPORT TO THE UNIVERSITIES.

6. AFTER PRESIDENT GEISEL RECESSED CONGRESS ON APRIL 1 THE STUDENTS' GRIEVANCES BECAME INCREASINGLY POLITICAL. UNIVERSITY STUDENT ORGANIZATIONS IN THE STATES OF RIO DE JANEIRO, MINAS GERAIS, AND RIO GRANDE DO SUL, AND IN THE FEDERAL DISTRICT BEGAN BY PROTESTING THE CLOSING OF CONGRESS AND WENT ON TO OTHER POLITICAL DEMANDS, PARTICULARLY AN AMNESTY FOR POLITICAL PRISONERS, RESTORATION OF FULL DEMOCRATIC LIBERTIES IN BRAZIL, THE ELIMINATION OF THE FIFTH INSTITUTIONAL ACT AND DECREE LAW 477 (WHICH PROHIBITS POLITICAL ACTION BY STUDENT GROUPS). THERE WERE MAJOR DEMONSTRATIONS IN SAO PAULO ON MAY 5 (SEE REFTEL) IN PROTEST AGAINST THE ARREST OF EIGHT WORKERS AND STUDENTS ON CHARGES OF SUBVERSION.

7. THE GOVERNMENT'S INITIAL STANCE HAD BEEN TO DOWNPLAY THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE UNIVERSITY DEMONSTRATIONS, WHICH EDUCATION MINISTER NEY BRAGA SAID WERE OF INTEREST TO LOCAL AUTHORITIES BUT NOT THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION. AFTER THE DEMONSTRATIONS ON MAY 5, HOWEVER, THE TUNE CHANGED AND NEY BRAGA CALLED THE SAO PAULO MARCH THE WORK OF "A FACELESS MINORITY OF STUDENTS, PROVOKED BY ELEMENTS OPPOSED TO THE LARGER INTERESTS OF THE BRAZILIAN PEOPLE. . . STRANGERS TO THE UNIVERSITY, OUT TO PERTURB AND DISRUPT INTERNAL TRANQUILITY." COL. ERASMO DIAS, SAO PAULO'S STATE SECRETARY OF PUBLIC SAFETY, SAID THE RECENT PROTESTS WERE NOT REPRESENTATIVE OF THE BELIEFS OF A MAJORITY OF THE STUDENTS AND THAT THE MOVEMENT'S LADERSHIP WAS COMPOSED OF "PROFESSIONAL SUBVERSIVES." IN HIS ORDER OF THE DAY ON V-E DAY, MAY 8, AIR FORCE MINISTER BRIGADIER ARARIPE MACEDO DECLARED THAT THE DEMONSTRATIONS ON UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES WERE PART OF THE PREPARATION FOR ARMED SUBVERSION, WHICH WOULD END IN GUERRILLA WARFARE.

8. EVEN NORMALLY MODERATE SAO PAULO GOVERNOR PAULO EGIDIO AGREED THAT SUBVERSIVES WERE INFILTRATING THE STUDENT MOVEMENT, WHICH HE SUGGESTED WAS BEING RADICALIZED. THE GOVERNOR ALSO GUARANTEED THE PHYSICAL SAFETY OF THE EIGHT ARRESTED STUDENTS AND WORKERS, ADDING THAT THEY WERE BEING HELD BY STATE SECURITY FORCES AND THAT THE SECOND ARMY WAS IN NO WAY INVOLVED IN THE INVESTIGATION

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INFO AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO  
AMCONSUL SAO PAULO

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POLICE AUTHORITIES ON MAY 10 ANNOUNCED THE EXONERATION AND IMMINENT RELEASE OF THREE OF THE ARRESTED, WHILE SOLICITING PREVENTIVE DETENTION ORDERS FOR THE REST. THE SAME DAY, HOWEVER, POLICE ARRESTED 20 STUDENTS IN SAO CARLOS, S.P., AND EIGHT IN CURITIBA IN CONNECTION WITH THE DEMONSTRATIONS. AS THOUGH TO UNDERLINE THE FACT THAT FEDERAL SECURITY AUTHORITIES WERE NOT IN THE FRONTLINES AGAINST THE STUDENTS. COL. TOLEDO DE CAMARGO, PRESIDENT GEISEL'S PRESS AIDE, SAID ON MAY 10 THAT HANDLING THE DEMONSTRATIONS WAS UP TO THE STATE GOVERNORS, IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE JUSTICE MINISTER'S INSTRUCTIONS.

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13. IN THE CONGRESS SEVERAL MDB DEPUTIES, AMONG THEM CHAMBER MINORITY LEADER ALencar Furtado, WERE QUICK TO SUPPORT THE STUDENTS' DEMONSTRATIONS AND POLITICAL GOALS. EVEN ARCH-CONSERVATIVE ARENA MAJORITY LEADER JOSE BONIFACIO SAID HE COULD UNDERSTAND THE DEMONSTRATIONS AND STRIKES AS LONG AS THEY WERE DIRECTED AGAINST LACK OF FUNDS AND POOR EDUCATIONAL CONDITIONS. HE WARNED, HOWEVER, THAT DEMONSTRATIONS COULD BECOME DANGEROUS AND WOULD HAVE TO BE REPRESSSED SHOULD THEY BECOME INFILTRATED BY SUBVERSIVES.

11. EDITORIAL REACTION HAS RUN AGAINST THE DEMONSTRATORS. LIBERAL JORNAL DO BRASIL, WHICH HAS ACKNOWLEDGED THE VALIDITY OF THE STUDENTS' UNIVERSITY-ORIENTED COMPLAINTS, EDITORIALIZED ON THE MAY 5 MARCH IN SAO PAULO: "BRAZIL IS NOT IN ANY CONDITION TO ABSORB TESTS LIKE THIS, WHICH HAVE THE OBJECTIVE OF UNLEASHING A VIOLENT SOLIDARITY THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY TO MAINTAIN AN EXCITED SOCIAL ATMOSPHERE." JORNAL, HOWEVER, CAUTIONED AGAINST 1968-STYLE GOVERNMENT REPRESSION, WARNING THAT INTERNAL POLITICAL CONDITIONS NOW QUITE DIFFERENT FROM 1968. FIVE DAYS LATER JORNAL WARNED UNIVERSITY STUDENTS THEY WERE BEING MANIPULATED BY EXTRA-CAMPUS GROUPS INCLUDING COMMUNIST ORGANIZATIONS. PRESTIGIOUS O ESTADO DE SAO PAULO CONGRATULATED BOTH PROTESTORS AND POLICE FOR THEIR RESTRAINT DURING THE MAY 5 MARCH BUT WARNED OF EXTREMIST ELEMENTS IN THE STUDENT LEADERSHIP.

12. COMMENT: AFTER SEVERAL YEARS OF ENFORCED TRANQUILITY ON CAMPUS A NEW GENERATION OF STUDENT LEADERS IS DETERMINED TO EXPERIENCE THE JOYS AND DANGERS OF POLITICS. THIS RESURGENCE OF LONG PENT-UP STUDENT PROTEST PARTAKES OF THE PREVAILING GENERAL MOOD OF PROTEST IN THE COUNTRY IN THE FACE OF CONTINUING ECONOMIC HARSHSHIP AND THE GOVERNMENT'S

UNPOPULAR RIGGING OF THE POLITICAL SYSTEM IN APRIL. THE STUDENT'S DEFIANT MOOD PROBABLY ALSO PARTICULARLY REFLECTS THE DISAFFECTION FELT AMONG BROAD SECTORS OF THE MIDDLE CLASS THAT ARE INCREASINGLY HARMED BY THE ECONOMIC AUSTERITY MEASURES. FINALLY, THE STUDENTS ARE EMBOLDENED TO TAKE MORE VOCAL POSITION ON POLITICAL ISSUES BY THE EXAMPLE OF INCREASED US OFFICIAL CONCERN FOR HUMAN RIGHTS.

13. ALTHOUGH IT HAS BRANDED STUDENT UNREST AS SUBVERSIVE, THE GOVERNMENT SO FAR HAS BEEN CLEARLY AT PAINS TO AVOID DRASIC REPRESSIVE MEASURES, SUCH AS VIOLENCE AGAINST STUDENTS OR INVASION OF UNIVERSITY PREMISES, THAT COULD MAKE THE ADMINISTRATION'S EBBING POPULARITY PLUMMET FURTHER OR SPARK A COUNTERWAVE OF TERRORISM. THOUGH NOT BACKING DOWN ON THE RIGHT OF PEACEFUL ASSEMBLY, STUDENTS THEMSELVES HAVE SO FAR ALSO SEEMED KEEN ON AVOIDING DIRECT PROVOCATIONS THAT COULD LEAD TO VIOLENCE.

14. RIGHT NOW THE GOVERNMENT'S GAME PLAN SEEMS TO BE TO AVOID INCIDENTS, PRESERVE IMAGE OF FIRNESS ON PUBLIC ORDER BY KEEPING DEMONSTRATIONS CONFINED TO CAMPUSES, AND WAIT FOR NEXT MONTH'S EXAMINATION PERIOD TO HAVE ITS USUAL DAMPENING EFFECT ON THE STUDENT PROTEST CYCLE. BUT GROWING TENDENCY AMONG MILITARY AND SECURITY FORCES TO SEE DEMONSTRATIONS AS SUBVERSION OR INCIPENT TERRORISM, RATHER THAN AS MERE EXPRESSION OF YOUTHFUL EBULLIENCE, LEAVES IMPRESSION THAT REGIME'S CONSERVATIVE SECTORS MAY COME TO FEEL THAT THEY ARE BEING PUSHED INTO A 1968-TYPE REPRESSIVE RESPONSE. END COMMENT. CRIMMINS

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